

FE Week

The end of the SFA?



COLLEGE FUTURE QUESTIONED BY COMMISSIONER



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EXCLUSIVE: Q&A WITH LATEST LORDS' MEMBER WOLF



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INVESTIGATION CALL OVER 16 TO 19 SAFEGUARDING FAILURE

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A Midland council looks set to investigate a local 16 to 19 provider after Ofsted inspectors found it was failing to safeguard learners.

The chair of Worcestershire County Council's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Lynne Duffy, (pictured) told *FE Week* she would be calling for a probe after Beacon Employment was hit with a grade four rating by the education watchdog.

Its report on the 88-learner provider, which specialises in supporting young people with learning difficulties, was published last week and followed inspection at the end of September.

It said: “Safeguarding arrangements for learners’ are inadequate because Beacon Employment does not meet its statutory requirements.”

Beacon chief executive Sandy Beech claimed the problem surrounded her staff not having the correct level of qualification, but Ofsted declined to comment further on the issue.

Nevertheless, the findings have resulted in the Education Funding Agency moving to terminate its contract with the Kidderminster-



based provider, and the local authority also looks set to act.

Coun Duffy said: “It is concerning that Beacon Employment doesn’t have proper safeguarding in place, definitely — safeguarding is absolutely paramount.”

She said she would bring the issue before her panel at its next meeting, in December, and would call for a full-scale council investigation into whether the problem was more widespread in the area.

“As a scrutiny team we would then ask for a report on all education providers, looking across the board to see where there’s a

weakness and tell the regional Children and Safeguarding Board too,” she said.

Worcestershire County Council’s cabinet member for children and families, Liz Eyre, said she was “aware” of the Beacon issue and a spokesperson for the authority added it was “looking into it”.

The spokesperson added that Beacon must “conduct a thorough and comprehensive review” of its safeguarding “as a matter of utmost urgency” and should ensure all staff responsible for safeguarding “quickly receive appropriate training”.

Inspectors judged the provider inadequate across all headline areas, saying not enough learners were achieving and managers had failed to respond to the areas for improvement highlighted during Beacon’s last inspection, which resulted in a grade three rating, in February 2012.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We are moving to terminate our contract with Beacon Employment as it has been found to be failing in its duties. Ofsted will work with the institution and we hope it will improve sufficiently for us to work with it in the future.”

However, Ms Beech told *FE Week* she “did not recognise” the Ofsted result and said claims the organisation was failing to

safeguard learners were “ridiculous”.

“We don’t accept the grades — there are areas within the report we think are extremely questionable,” she said.

“I’m not saying we’re perfect but we work with a range of people with all sorts of issues, we work with social workers and others closely on safeguarding issues... we have experience and knowledge, and that’s what it’s about, not ticking a box”

Ms Beech claims Ofsted focussed on the fact that no staff member responsible for safeguarding had a level three safeguarding qualification — and so failed to meet statutory requirements.

The inspection report was published in the same week as the fourth and final Ofsted monitoring visit report for Stockport College, which was branded inadequate in October last year.

The monitoring visit, at the end of September, found the college had made reasonable improvements in maths and English provision, governor oversight, teaching and accommodation, but insufficient progress on improving success rates.

Interim principal Ian Clinton said: “While I recognise the college still has improvements to make, I am reassured this latest visit endorses much of the hard work that has taken place.”

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NEWS

MORGAN'S FUNDING RATE ASSURANCE LEADS TO LONG-TERM SECURITY PLEA

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Sector figures have called for long-term funding security after Education Secretary Nicky Morgan (pictured) told MPs the government had “no plans” to cut the 18-year-old funding rate again next year.

The 157 Group and the Sixth Form Colleges’ Association (SFCA) welcomed comments from Ms Morgan during education questions in Parliament on Monday (October 27).

She said: “We have no plans to reduce the 16 to 18 academic funding rate in the 2015/16 academic year.”

Colleges and sixth form colleges were hit this academic year with a 17.5 per cent funding rate for full time 18-year-olds — a move implemented by Ms Morgan’s predecessor, Michael Gove.

Funding for 16 and 17-year-olds remained untouched from the previous year, at £4,000, while for 18-year-olds the rate fell to £3,300.

However, Ms Morgan further told MPs: “We can’t confirm the base rate of funding until we know how many places we’re going to fund and we won’t know that until January.”

The comments came just days after *FE Week* revealed Education Funding Agency director for young people Peter Mucklow had written to tell providers the

16 to 18 funding rate for 2015/16 would not be announced until January.

Executive director of the 157 Group Lynne Sedgmore said: “While this message provides some stability within which to plan for one year, it implies further cuts are still to come after that.

“16 to 18-year-old education has already borne the brunt of cuts to date. What we need is a truly long term funding settlement so that we can plan beyond every individual year.”

David Igoe, chief executive of the SFCA, said: “This is a recognition that sixth form colleges have been cut to the bone and cannot sustain further cuts without serious consequences to delivery.

“In the face of further funding pressures within the DfE we were fearful of further cuts being announced this autumn.”

He added: “The new government after May 2015 needs to address the inequalities in the funding system to ensure the 16 to 18 phase receives its fair share of the available resource and sufficient to continue to provide the rounded education young people need to make the progress they are capable of and aspire to.”

Association of Colleges assistant chief executive Julian Gravatt said: “It is good news that there is no plan to change the funding formula.

“However, big issues remain, including the lack of protective ringfence for funding the education of 16 to 18-year-olds and the additional pension and national insurance costs heading towards colleges.”

Commissioner — ‘college cannot operate on own’

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Norton Radstock College has been told it can no longer operate on its own after FE Commissioner Dr David Collins identified issues with leadership, governance and college finances.

The 4,700-learner college, near Bath, was graded inadequate by Ofsted in May and has posted a deficit every year for the last three years.

In a newly-released report on his visit in June, Dr Collins called for changes in leadership and governance and said the college needed to operate “within a larger partnership” if it was to meet the needs of learners. It prompted Skills Minister Nick Boles to place the college into administered status, which means it will lose its spending powers and the ability to hire and fire staff.

In his report, Dr Collins said the college lacked direction and was “drifting,” and added that management and governance roles were “blurred and overlapping”.

He said: “The capacity, capability and accountabilities within the senior team are not meeting the needs of the college. The senior team does not review progress around teaching and learning with sufficient rigour or regularity.

“Too many staff at all levels seem comfortable with the college being seen predominantly as a caring institution for those learners who cannot travel elsewhere. Senior staff are quick to blame poor performance on the college’s approach to inclusivity.”

It is the third time Dr Collins has questioned the future viability of a college as an independent organisation in his 11 inspection reports to date. He made similar comments following visits to Bicton College and Stratford-upon-Avon College earlier in the year.

But hope for Stratford has been restored after Dr Collins gave positive feedback after a follow-up visit, having originally questioned the “long-term viability of the college as an independent institution” after his first visit in May.

He said: “I’m really pleased on my recent monitoring visit at the college on how much progress has been made through the hard work of staff and the new governing body. The college has not only improved on quality, but is well on the way to resolving its financial difficulties. There is still a lot of work to do but it’s great to be able to report on a success story.”

However, Dr Collins concluded that although Norton Radstock had done a lot in the past to develop “an inclusive and caring

FE WEEK NEWS IN BRIEF

College bid from school

A school in Halifax is aiming to join the FE sector with a bid to open a sixth form college in the latest round of free school bids, which closed October 10.

Trinity Academy in Calderdale wants the 1000-place college to open in September 2016.

The FE sector has already entered its own bids with New College Pontefract hoping for a free school sixth form college, in Doncaster, and Croydon College and New College Swindon aiming to open free schools with sixth form provision.

No sackings at Ofsted

No Ofsted inspectors have been sacked or punished in the last five years in connection with FE and skills inspections, *FE Week* can reveal.

A Freedom of Information (FoI) request by *FE Week* has shown that no FE inspectors were dismissed, reprimanded or disciplined in the last five academic years.

It comes after previous *FE Week* FoI requests uncovered 35 complaints about FE and skills inspections between September 2012 and November 2013 alone — nine of which were upheld.

Boles on digital skills

Skills Minister Nick Boles will give evidence before the House of Lords digital skills committee.

The committee, chaired by Lady Morgan of Huyton, is taking evidence on the digital capability of the nation. Mr Boles will be questioned on the issue on Tuesday, November 18.

It comes after the committee heard that the adult skills budget was being spent on “the wrong sort of IT” from a panel of expert witnesses on October 14.

NEWS

‘Plan C’ fears as Hub back-up phased out

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The closure of the Skills Funding Agency’s (SFA) online data collection (OLDC) system as a back-up for its breakdown-plagued replacement Hub system has prompted concerns about the lack of a “plan C”.

The OLDC was phased out on Friday (October 31), meaning providers must route all future Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns data through the Hub — a system which has been fraught with teething problems since its introduction in July.

As reported by *FE Week*, the Hub has broken down at a critical time at least three times since it started being used.

The SFA previously acknowledged problems in August for R12 returns and also in September, when the Hub broke down on the deadline day for R13. And ongoing issues were reported as recently as last month when providers trying to meet the R14 deadline were hit with crashes.

Providers had been using both systems to make submissions, which meant that returns made through the OLDC were still submitted, even where the Hub failed. But the SFA has confirmed the Hub is now the only system available.

The situation has sparked a wide-ranging debate on the SFA’s FE Connect online forums. Martin West, a freelance consultant and software supplier, said: “This all should

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Hub system ‘ready’ to calculate funds

The Skills Funding Agency will be hoping that long-standing problems in developing new funding software are at an end as it prepares to use the new Hub data collection system to calculate provider payments for the first time.

The agency’s revamp of its data collection and funding system was due to have been completed 11 months ago.

But it has suffered ongoing problems leading to the continued use of the old Online Data Collection (OLDC) as a crutch for its replacement, the Hub, since September.

However, the SFA has announced that the Hub will be stepping up to the plate for the R11 data return, due in by July 4, with responsibility for calculations.

An agency spokesperson said: “We intend to continue to run the two systems in parallel until we consider it appropriate to formally de-commission the old system.”

A spokesperson for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers said: “Providers seem sanguine about dealing with the issue. We hope however that a switch to a single system can be made soon.”

An Association of Colleges spokesperson said: “It’s imperative accurate information is on record and a back-up system during this transition period offers some reassurance.”

FE Week’s story on the Hub launch in June

be of concern to the sector and I fail to understand why these questions are not being raised at a higher level than this forum.

“I expect that despite our requests that the OLDC should be retained for 14/15 due to the unresolved issues with the Hub, that the OLDC cannot be used as a plan B for 14/15 as it is not set up to do so. This begs the questions does the SFA have a plan C and have the objectives of the data collections and funding transformation project been achieved?”

An SFA spokesperson acknowledged the Hub had not had enjoyed a smooth introduction, and although she sought to reassure providers that technical issues had been resolved quickly, she could offer no information about what failsafe system would operate if problems persisted.

A spokesperson for the Association of Colleges said: “The plan to modernise

Lambeth College staff back to polls on industrial action proposal

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Lambeth College staff who went on a five-week strike earlier this year will vote on whether to take further industrial action after rejecting “improved” offers over contract changes.

University and College Union (UCU) members walked out indefinitely on June 3 in a dispute over new staff contracts introduced on April 1, which the UCU said would leave staff with longer working hours, less sick pay and less annual leave, before returning to work on July 9.

The UCU shelved a ballot for further strike action mid-voting three weeks ago to allow members to consider whether to accept “improved” offers from college bosses.

But these were rejected by 92 per cent of branch members who voted — although it is understood less than 55 per cent of UCU members who work at the college took part in the ballot.

A UCU spokesperson said a ballot asking members whether they supported further industrial action “up to and including indefinite strike action” would be launched today (November 3) and close on November 17.

He said: “The latest proposals tabled by the college were roundly rejected by an overwhelming majority of UCU members.

“Our members are dedicated to their learners and would much prefer to be teaching than thinking about further

industrial action but [college principal] Mark Silverman needs to address what are clearly widely held objections within the college to the introduction of inferior contracts that creates a two tier workforce.”

The college offered a guarantee that staff taken on before April 1 would have stayed on the original contract until at least September 2017.

Alternatively, existing staff could have accepted a £1,500 “cash incentive” to transfer to the new contract by September 2016.

Both options were dependent on staff agreeing to work an extra hour per week from September — increasing their overall annual working hours from 828 to 864.

Mr Silverman said: “It’s extremely disappointing that UCU has rejected what we offered.

“We should remember that this dispute is about a new contract for new staff. The new contract does not need to apply to staff employed by the college before April 1.

“It was UCU that said there needed to be a single contract [for old and new staff]. We made what I think was a very reasonable offer to move towards that, which was rejected.

“We are working on a plan to deal with any possible strike action, but haven’t got to the stage yet of knowing how many staff will be on strike or when it will take place, so it is too early to talk about specific measures.”

The college was slapped with an Ofsted grade four rating in 2012 but worked its way up to a grade three last year.

Fine for college after worker breaks back

A Lancashire college has been fined £20,000 after an employee broke his back while changing the filter of an air extraction system.

Burnley College admitted it failed to protect the 63-year-old engineering technician — despite specialising in teaching health and safety courses — at Preston Crown Court On October 23.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Rose Leese-Weller said: “It’s astonishing Burnley College failed to ensure basic health and safety systems were in place when it employs lecturers who specialise in this area.”

She added that because the filter had been fitted quickly into a badly chosen location, the worker, who has not been named, “had no choice” but to stand with one foot on a step ladder and one foot on a cabinet to reach the filter.

When the stepladder toppled from under him, he fell and landed on a bench, breaking his spine in several places and fracturing his breast bone.

He can now only walk short distances and is likely to need pain killers for the rest of his life.

An investigation by the HSE found a supervisor was aware he was working in this way, but failed to make alterative, safer arrangements.

No one from Burnley College was available for comment.

data collection arrangements is right, but we’ve passed on college concerns about the operations of the Hub to the SFA and have encouraged it to tackle known problems.

“When we last discussed this a few days ago, the Hub seemed to be working more effectively than it had been the previous weekend.”

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), said: “Independent providers, mindful of their cashflow considerations, need to have confidence that the Hub is functioning properly, especially now that the old system has been phased out.

“Providers should be paid in a timely manner for delivery and if there are problems with the Hub, providers should not be penalised as a result. To date, the SFA has reassured AELP that no provider will be disadvantaged in the future with the backup system no longer in place.”

The SFA spokesperson said: “We acknowledge that data collections processes in the 2013 to 2014 funding year did not run smoothly. We acted quickly to resolve any technicalities, when they occurred, and communicated at the earliest opportunity to reassure our users.

“During the 2013 to 2014 data collection year, we have improved our systems and listened to users’ feedback. In the main the systems for the 2014 to 2015 funding year are working well.”

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The FE Wolf at the Lords’ door

Professor Alison Wolf, the influential academic who authored the government’s 2011 report on vocational education, is one of just four people to have been given a coveted life peerage by the Prime Minister in this Parliament, and will soon join the ranks of Peers as a cross-bencher without party political affiliation.

As she prepares to fight the Garter King of Arms over her desire to be Baroness Wolf of Dulwich, a title she fears may be denied her due to the popularity of the South London suburb, the 63-year-old King’s College professor spoke to *FE Week* reporter Freddie Whittaker about study programmes, apprenticeships and careers guidance, and why she remains committed to the principle of House of Lords reform — even if it means giving up her seat in the future.

Tell us about the peerage. Was it something you expected? Do you think it will give you a bigger voice to speak up for FE?

I had no idea that the Prime Minister even appointed any. If I had been asked to do it as a party political peer I would have said no. That I am absolutely sure about.

But I do think somebody has got to do something about the Lords, even if that involves throwing me out again. We did a half-baked reform and we never finished. I am a believer in second chambers, and not just because I’ve been asked to join one, but it needs to be younger, it needs to have more people who are still in the world of work and therefore not losing touch with everything.

I haven’t the faintest idea what the government is going to look like after next May, or whether they will have the slightest interest in listening to me or not, but I do think will give me a platform.

I had a fantastic chance to write a report for the government, but what I have concentrated on are the things that the report covered. You can’t do everything, and there are some major issues in the sector which I didn’t get a chance to talk about, I mean particularly post-19, but also 16 to 19.

There have been some concerns raised about study programmes. They were your brainchild. What do you make it all?

I was a bit cross with the Ofsted report. If you actually read it carefully and you actually look at the sample size, it was very anecdotal. So I haven’t lost heart. I mean, obviously it was a bit disappointing, but it was very small-scale, it’s very early days. I still really, really believe in it.

[Responding to claims FE is picking up the responsibility — and bill — for learners when school sixth forms reject learners without Cs at English and maths GCSEs] The FE sector, for better or worse, has always had this dual role, it’s always had to balance itself between being full of centres of excellence and things, which are selective, demanding and all of that, and the fact that is basically is the sector that soaks up everything else that everybody else rejects. It always has been.

What I’m really concerned about is the funding for 16 to 19. I mean, the situation is just not tenable. They cannot go on and on and on cutting 16 to 19 funding. I don’t like ringfences because the trouble is, if you have ringfence here, ringfence there, ringfence



Professor Alison Wolf in her university office

there, that everything else gets squeezed out. I actually want more money for 16 to 19, not to ringfence what’s already there.

The funding cut for 18-year-olds worries me enormously. It just seems to me that these are the kids that we really, really need to try and help before it is too late. If they’re in their third year, it probably means they’ve had some false starts, but if they’re there in their third year, then they’re really giving it a go, and many kids really need that third year if something went wrong when they were 11, 12, 13 years old.

What do you think about apprenticeships, the proposed reforms and the party pledges around boosting them?

I am cheering falls in the total number of apprenticeships, and I am aghast at the fact that the two main parties are screaming about numbers, numbers, numbers.

There is no point doing an apprenticeship if it’s not decent. So if you set a numerical target, right there you have blown quality out of the water. End of story. I can’t imagine what got into their [Cameron and Miliband] heads. They should know about targets by now, shouldn’t they? I was aghast. I thought

that was just stupid.

With the reforms, ideally, what you want is for people to put money in and get it back rather than be given money, for two reasons. First of all, from what we know about the psychology of human beings is that if they are actually putting even small amounts of money in, they really get involved in what it is being spent on. And the other thing that we know is that basically refunding people is much less bureaucratic than giving them money.

“They cannot go on and on and on cutting 16 to 19 funding

When you get government funding, for all sorts of absolutely predictable and totally understandable reasons, you feel like a regulatory mountain has fallen on your head, because this is public money. What you want to avoid is giving employers money to

spend, which they then have to account for in incredible detail, which is what happens whenever you get public funds.

You don’t want them to feel that it’s going to cost them huge amounts of money that they might never get back.

What can we do to end the age-old careers advice problem?

Schools are not going to promote apprenticeships, except to kids they want to get rid of. You can put it in every piece of legislation you pass from now to the year 3000, and they still won’t.

But I don’t think anybody else really ever does it. My sense is, you have to give responsibility to schools and you have to find some way of checking that they are making things available. But it’s also an area where I actually think the model has to change.

I just think it asks somebody to do what no human being can do. It asks them to know enough about every individual who comes in and enough about the whole labour market to be able to give really good, personalised advice to a totally random sample of hundreds of people. You can’t do that. Nobody can do that.

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FE WEEK COMMENT

One chief, one agency

Despite a denial to the contrary, the appointment of Education Funding Agency (EFA) chief executive Peter Lauener to the same role at the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) will lead to speculation about the two organisations’ independent existence.

A return to the days of a single body that funds under and over 18 education and training would certainly offer hope of the coherent approach to the FE and skills sector so longed-for by many.

And it looks all the more likely with the same chief executive heading the two bodies that separately fund the two age groups, from two different government departments.

A reduction in bureaucracy, with one agency rather than two, is an obvious benefit not only for government, but also providers, who would only need one conversation. Less confusion over who funds what would also be welcome.

Not to mention the fact it would end the absurd situation of different funding methodologies for learners on the same courses — possibly even sat next to each other in the same classroom.

So if this is, despite what government says, a move towards merger then we do, as Mr Hughes from Niace says, appear to be moving in the “right direction”.

Chris Henwood

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TOP PETER LAUENER TWEETS

@Tricia_CFL: Delighted to hear of Peter Lauener's appointment as permanent CE of @skillsfunding: coherent overview much needed!

@ipryce: Really pleased with announcement that Peter Lauener is now Chief Exec of @skillsfunding and EFA with the closer relationship it brings

@SteveHewittMIS: Did I miss all the Peter Lauener 2 agencies/1 boss hoo-ha yesterday, or are we all quite sanguine about it?

@stewartsegal: @AELPUK @skillsfunding Excellent news of the appointment of Peter Lauener as CE of SFA

@guildheceo: Peter Lauener is v good but EFA & SFA seems a lot? Perhaps DFE/BIS think devolving skills now inevitable?



Merger murmurs after Lauener gets SFA role

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The future of the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) has been brought into question with Education Funding Agency (EFA) chief Peter Lauener taking on the running of both bodies in a move hailed by sector leaders as heralding a more “joined-up” approach.

Current EFA chief executive Mr Lauener replaces SFA interim boss Keith Smith from today, but the government has already denied the appointment indicates a merger of the two funding bodies. However, the move has nevertheless led to speculation about the potential for closer working, or even merger.

Former Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Graham Hoyle posted on Twitter: “Great move. Up to Peter to develop a case for merger after the General Election and argue from the inside.”

David Hughes, chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: “This signals a more joined-up approach to learning and skills from the government, something we called for in our general election manifesto in June. Bringing together the leadership of the EFA and SFA is a significant step in the right direction.”

Peter Pendle, chief executive of AMiE (Association of Managers in Education) – the leadership arm of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said: “Peter’s knowledge and openness to collaborative working could very well increase the chances of a more integrated sector.”

Dr Lynne Sedgmore, executive director of the 157 Group, said: “Having one chief executive for both agencies will surely help bring about the consistency of approach for which many in FE have long argued. While we recognise the announcement does not indicate a merging of the agencies, we welcome the signal it most certainly gives that funding for our whole education system must be looked at in the round and through the same lens.”

Malcolm Trobe, deputy general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: “We already have a very good working relationship with Peter through his current role at the EFA and we look forward to continuing working with him in this new additional role. The bringing together of these two roles is a very logical step by the Coalition and should help coordinate the work of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education.”

Mr Lauener has been chief executive of the EFA since it was formed in April 2012, having also been chief executive of predecessor organisation the Young People’s Learning Agency (YPLA).

“I am delighted to take on this [SFA] role and am looking forward to the challenge of making a difference in the skills sector,” he said. “I have a long-standing interest and commitment to apprenticeships and skills and I am keen to be involved in the next stage of reform.”

Skills Minister Nick Boles said: “Peter brings a wealth of experience in skills and in working with employers. In his new role leading both SFA and EFA, he will join up our programme of reform across the education and skills sector.”

COMMENTS

Reform warning as apprenticeships plummet

Put simply, a reasoned provider would not go anywhere near 25+ apps if they want to run a profitable and successful business. Any the Apps reforms will do nothing to address the above issues. It seems the new minister is beginning to see the issues with the proposals presented.

Peter Marples

Yes loans for apprentices were a disaster and yes the move from frameworks to standards is causing confusion and uncertainty (no new standard starts yet?) but the main reason is that the FE budget has been reduced and apprenticeships are part of FE — regardless of what we might think.

Ben John

loans and then back to funding will have dramatically impacted 24+ apprenticeships. It takes time to rebuild market demand so I am not surprised that this age group has taken such a tumble. The good news is that 16 to 18 apprenticeships are increasing given that we haven’t been long out of a recession which disproportionately hit young people.

As we seek to rebuild confidence and numbers it would be unwise to hit employers with a potentially confusing and time consuming change in funding mechanism. Steady as she goes I say — keep change to a minimum.

Matt Garvey

Adult skills budget going on ‘wrong sort of IT’

Who is going to pay for all of this, what opportunities are there for existing

IT delivery staffs to engage in regular relevant professional development in this field? Finally, where is the private sector in all of this?

Paul Smithers

Old myths need to be smashed and the actual advantages of various choices of IT suddenly start to offer new and exciting possibilities.

Who’d have thought, just a few short years ago that we’d have digital devices in our pockets that can outperform desktop computers from three years ago, and that can provide a multitude of applications and functions? Why, then are old and outdated technologies and applications still being taught? Here comes the reason: technology is changing faster than those who purport to teach it.

John Rudkin

NEWS

ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE LOOKS AT DFE PARTICIPATION RECORD

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A sector leader has called for “coherence” in government’s approach to improving participation of 16 to 18-year-olds in education and training after a key committee announced an inquiry into the issue.

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, welcomed news the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) would begin to examine participation today (Monday), but said more joined-up thinking was needed.

It will look at how the Department for Education (DfE) aims to pay for an increasing number of learners, while at the same time reducing spending and comes with the Education Select Committee currently looking at 16 to 19 apprenticeships and traineeships.

“The DfE is implementing its reforms at the same time as reducing spending on 16 to 18-year-olds. In 2013/14, the DfE’s core budget of £7bn for this age group was 8 per cent lower in real terms than in 2010/11,” said a PAC spokesperson

“This inquiry will look at the challenges the DfE faces, the progress it has made to date, and how it can get better information about the effectiveness of its reforms to increase participation and quality further in future.”

Mr Segal said: “We are pleased that the PAC is concerned about participation at age 16 to 18.

“However, the fact that other committees and inquiries have this on the agenda shows that it is a major issue for the UK but also that there is a danger that we will get a fragmented approach to the solutions.

“Several government departments such as the DfE, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Work and Pensions are involved in delivering services and funding to support this group. We need a more coherent response to the issue.”

Mr Segal also raised concerns about the wording of the inquiry announcement, which states that the raising of the participation age means “young people stay in full-time education or training” post-16.

He said: “The statement is technically right but gives the impression that a job is not a valid option. The terminology of young people staying in full time education or training is very misleading and many will assume that this will exclude getting a job or even taking a traineeship programme where work experience is a major part of the programme.”

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel also welcomed the inquiry, adding: “The protective

ringfence for the education of five to 16-year-olds has resulted in a reduction of funding for students aged 16 to 18.

“Education for this age group has already taken its fair share of cuts — it is time for this ringfence to be extended in line with the raising of the participation age.”

The announcement of the new inquiry comes with PAC chair Margaret Hodge (pictured) having already lamented figures in a report by the National Audit Office that showed fewer than half of eligible traineeship providers were running the scheme.

She said: “Participation in education and training for 16 to 18-year-olds is vital for ensuring young people get the best start in life as well as for our economy and for society as a whole.

“These young people have not been helped by the department’s failure to manage its providers — with only 200 out of 459 eligible training providers actually delivering the traineeships they promised.”

The first hearing will take place at 3.15pm today (Monday, November 3) at the committee rooms in Portcullis House. DfE permanent secretary Chris Wormald has been called to give evidence.



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New minimum standards system prompts questions

New minimum standards categories have been unveiled by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) for 2014/15 — but the sector has been left asking why they were not ready earlier.

Guidance for post-19 training, issued on Tuesday (October 28), revealed how qualification success rates (QSRs) will change. Previously, providers’ QSRs were divided into three categories — long, for courses of 24 weeks or more, short, for courses lasting two to 24 weeks, and very short, for less than two weeks.

However, these have been recategorised and further divided into 13 qualification types, including apprenticeship frameworks (which continue to have a 55 per cent success rate threshold), A-level (which continues at 75 per cent), AS-level (which continues at 63 per cent), awards, certificates and diplomas.

Association of Colleges senior policy manager Joy Mercer said: “It is disappointing these new methods and standards are implemented retrospectively — a pilot year would have been a better option.”

Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal said: “Providers need to manage their provision in line with the minimum standards guidelines and these should be published well before the end of the year to which they are applied.”

Providers face the SFA intervention process if they fail to hit the QSR thresholds.

COLLEGES TELL MPS OF APPRENTICESHIP FUNDING REFORM FEARS

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Further education colleges have added their voices to a growing list of sector organisations warning apprenticeship funding reforms could put employers off the programme and result in falling numbers.

In written evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee (pictured right), which will hold the first hearing of its inquiry into 16 to 19 apprenticeships and traineeships on Wednesday (November 5), several prominent colleges and college groups aired concerns.

It comes after the government unveiled plans to route apprenticeship funding through employers — with use of the taxation system — rather than training providers and to demand that employers pay up to a third of the cost of training and assessment.

The proposals have prompted concerns about future employer engagement from bodies such as the Association of Employment and Learning Providers and the Confederation of British Industry, but colleges have now used their committee submissions to voice their similar concerns.

The Manchester College Group said:



“The requirements being introduced for matched expenditure could have a much more negative effect for two reasons.

“First, because prescribing what money can be spent on and matched, will lead to an inevitable increase in bureaucracy in order to ensure that the money is spent on the approved things, and second, because employers cannot deliver their own work based training and receive funding support for it but rather can only receive funding support when they buy training from an external source.”

Central Bedfordshire College also contributed. It welcomed the introduction of “simplified” funding rates, but added: “It is identified that many employers

do not welcome the greater involvement of HMRC in their financial concerns, and many view it as an increase in the bureaucracy involved in employing an apprentice.

“The idea that employers negotiate with training providers to agree the price and ensure it delivers the best value for their company, risks those employers choosing the cheapest provider and potentially compromising quality.

“For those employers where the cost of employing an apprentice is a very real concern, or where an employer sees an apprentice merely as a cheap source of labour, now with the possibility of increased financial incentives attached, there is a clear danger that those young people at the centre of these initiatives will be the ones to suffer.”

And Newham College of FE, in East London, said: “While it is too early to judge the changes as they are not all implemented, our conversations with small employers would seem to indicate a potential drastic reduction to them taking on apprentices.

“The amount of administration involved, their lack of understanding of it, their own capacity and the fixed contribution demanded are the reasons for this opinion.”

The inquiry, which was first announced by committee chair Graham Stuart (pictured) in May, will examine the range of courses available, current levels of employer engagement in apprenticeships and the expected impact of recently proposed government reforms, along with discussions about whether investment in apprenticeships represents value for money in terms of future wage returns.

It will also look at how the government can encourage better engagement in both traineeships and apprenticeships from both employers and learners, and will examine factors which prevent young people considering apprenticeships.

The first hearing is due to start at 9.30am. Witnesses include David Massey from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, City & Guilds managing director Kirstie Donnelly and Edge Foundation policy and research director David Harbourne.

Written submissions to the House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry into 16 to 19 apprenticeship and traineeships				
	What are the current levels of employer engagement in apprenticeships, and what further steps could the government take to improve this?	What is the impact of recent changes to the funding of apprenticeships and traineeships?	How could the government encourage businesses of all sizes and in all sectors to offer apprenticeships?	What factors prevent more young people considering apprenticeships and how could these be overcome?
Association of Colleges (AoC)	Employer engagement in apprenticeships sits at varying levels. The new trailblazer process requires a relatively small group of employers in a specific sector to develop apprenticeship standards on behalf of a potentially very large number of employers. There is a risk that developing this as a small group may result in certain standards or assessment not meeting the needs of every business in that particular sector.	Colleges remain concerned that the new funding system will further disengage small to medium sized businesses that will not be able to sustain their finances using the proposed PAYE model. There is a fear that only large employers who are capable of dealing with the administration of this new system and paying for apprentices up front will reap the benefits of employing apprentices.	It is important for colleges, providers, LEPs and local Chambers of Commerce to outline the rewards of taking on an apprentice. In industries where a levy is taken from every employer, there appears to be a greater degree of understanding and 'buy in' to training. The new process of funding will require a direct contribution whereas a levy requires employers to contribute to the development of the future workforce.	The biggest barrier to young people considering an apprenticeship is their lack of knowledge about what it is and how to apply for one. Impartial careers advice is imperative and would immediately provide information about alternative routes to traditional academic study. Too many students leave school unaware of their options or choose to stay on at a school sixth form and go on to university.
Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP)	There appears to be some confusion about the actual number of businesses who currently employ an apprentice. The AELP view is that the uptake by employers is much higher than government suggest because some employers may not have an apprentice currently but they have had one in the last year or two. We also do not think it is realistic to expect all businesses to take an apprentice.	AELP has always supported the key objectives of the current apprenticeship reforms, however we are concerned that the drive towards direct employer funding, mandatory cash contributions and negotiated pricing may well create barriers and bureaucracy for many employers who may as a result walk away from delivering apprenticeships. Many employers and their representative bodies have also expressed concerns.	The funding system should support the main objectives for the apprenticeship programme, so it needs to be focused on engaging more employers by simplifying the process and giving employers more choice. The current system of funding does work but we do need to encourage more investment from employers and make the system more transparent.	The statutory guidance makes it clear that the raising of the Participation Age does not mean that young people are required to stay on in schools but anecdotal evidence suggests that this is not always being followed. Too often young people that would benefit from an apprenticeship are actively discouraged from considering the vocational route and given the impression apprenticeships are for less able people.
Ofsted	Inspectors have found that the active involvement of employers is the most significant factor that differentiates strong from weak provision. In the poor provision inspected, apprentices made slow progress and too few succeeded, or succeeded within the time allocated. This was often due to poor links between the providers and employers.	As funding transfers to employers they need to know their new responsibilities and will need help to find good quality training. Employers need easy and timely access to high quality information on the availability and quality of training providers to make informed choices.*	The primary factor in any business offering apprenticeships must be its ability to provide the full range of training and experience expected to the required standard. Collaborative arrangements such as group training associations have historically provided a very effective method for small business to engage with apprenticeships.	The status of vocational training and apprenticeships remains a concern for Ofsted. The low minimum pay for an apprentice contributes to this perception and may well be a disincentive to young people as well as underlining the low status of apprenticeships. It is worrying that the number not paid the legal minimum is rising.
Departments for Education (DfE) and Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	Data indicates that the number of employers offering apprenticeships is growing, with over 228,000 employer workplaces employing an apprentice in AY 2012/13. In the same year, 868,700 people were undertaking an apprenticeship – the highest recorded in modern history. This included 181,300 16 to 18-year-olds.	The funding changes...have helped to significantly drive up the quality of provision, and our AGE has supported more than 80,000 apprentice starts. Through our reforms, we will give employers control of apprenticeship funding to help make apprenticeships more rigorous and responsive to the needs of employers.	We recognise that regulation, or perceived burden, can present a substantive barrier to participation. The current system of apprenticeships is currently highly regulated. We are using the Deregulation Bill 2014 to amend the primary legislation covering apprenticeships.	We know that there are significant and on-going misconceptions about apprenticeships amongst young people and the people and organisations that influence them. These tend to focus on an outdated view of apprenticeships primarily focused on manual and low level work.
	*Answered under a different header	Source: Parliament.uk/education-committee	Some responses shortened for brevity	

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PROFILE



TEENAGE TIMETABLER

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Most teenagers spend their schooldays daydreaming about life outside the classroom, but that wasn't the case for Andy Gannon. The 157 Group director of policy admits it was his "nerdy side" which prompted him to crave a career in education from an early age, but not quite in the way you might expect. "I have a slightly nerdy side to me", he tells me as we sit down over coffee at his flat in a leafy South West London suburb. "I was fascinated by the way in which a school operated — by really tedious things like timetables and the structure of the staffing and how you made sure that three classes weren't all in the same room at the same time. "I used to sit at home and think: 'It'd be quite nice to run a school or an organisation that had logistical elements to it' and, interestingly, when I became a teacher, one

of the first bits of additional responsibility I had was as exams coordinator, which meant I got to sit on my own in a room for hours, organising timetables." Gannon, aged 43, was brought up in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, where he tells me he was a "classic academic kid" who was "universally known as the square". "I did very well at school", he explains. "There were very few things that challenged me except for PE. I always hated PE and I didn't like anything where I had to use my hands because I'm just not a creative person. "I was a classic academic kid, and I'm an only child so I had an awful lot of time at home to spend musing and thinking and doing homework and all that stuff without the distraction of brothers and sisters." Gannon studied languages at Jesus College, Cambridge, and spent a year in France from 1991 to 1992, graduating in 1993 with a first class degree. But his higher education is something he admits to having "a very strange

relationship with". "I never planned it," he says. "I applied because my head of modern languages said I was good at French and German, and I should go to Cambridge. I didn't think twice about it. It never occurred to me that Cambridge might not necessarily be somewhere where I would have a lot of fun, or that the course might not really be what I wanted. "I guess I now look back at it, in the midst of all the conversations we now have about careers guidance and personal development, and although I don't regret my time at Cambridge, I'm pretty sure that if the approach to careers education within my school had been different, I might have made a different choice." With education still at the front of his mind, Gannon moved to Bristol to take a PGCE at the city's university. He started his teaching career at a secondary school, initially at Boswells School in Chelmsford then at Langley Grammar School in Slough. It was during his four years of teaching,

between 1994 and 1998, that life changed for Gannon. His first proper relationship, and a decision to choose life over work for the first time saw him leave the profession, but not before he stood up and told an entire grammar school assembly that he was gay. "By the mid-1990s, I had decided I was now a relationship person, and I was out and proud and gay," he explains. "Rather misguidedly, as a 26-year-old, I stood up and effectively told everybody. "Unfortunately, I had perhaps overestimated the extent to which things had moved on by 1998. The kids were remarkably supportive, still to this day I've got a couple of cards saying: 'Good on you, Sir.' One of them said he had decided to come out because of what I'd done as well, which was quite touching. "But I had very mixed reactions from the teaching staff. The local paper got hold of the story and started trying to make it into more than it was. "Unfortunately it wasn't long before I was

going to leave anyway, so the paper tried to make it look like that was the reason I was leaving."

"I've got some interesting ideas to offer for the world of education"

Gannon's work in FE began at Southampton City College, where he joined as a press officer in 1998. He worked as a communications officer for Hampshire County Council from 2000 to 2002 when he re-joined the college as tutorial coordinator before becoming head of student support in 2004. He described his move into the heady world of public relations as "a complete fluke". He says: "I had applied for something completely different within the marketing department. It wasn't a conscious decision,

It's a personal thing

What is your favourite book, and why?
Anything by Bill Bryson or John O'Farrell, because I have never been good at fiction and I like a book that makes me laugh

What is your pet hate?
People's inconsideration of other people

What do you do to switch off after work?
I devour bits of trivia from Wikipedia and other corners of the internet — and am always planning for my next holiday

If you could invite anyone, living or dead, to a dinner party who would it be?
Victoria Wood (for her spot-on British wit), Agnetha Faltskog (because she was a childhood idol), Harry Beck (because the Tube map fascinates me) and Nick Clegg (because I suspect he has an interesting tale to tell about the last four years)

What did you want to be when you were growing up?
A DJ or a newsreader — on the BBC, because I lived in a house where the TV didn't get ITV



Left: Gannon with partner Dan Watts in Corsica, Summer 2014



Below: Gannon aged 3
Below: Gannon aged 3 on a beach in Dorset
Gannon, centre, with, from left: his grandmother Edith Macnamara, mother Carol, father Patrick and aunt Janet Macnamara. At the Senate House in Cambridge, 1993

officer, before becoming director of policy to years ago. His rise through the ranks of the FE policy world could be described as fast, but Gannon is keen to play down the possibility that he may eventually succeed Dr Lynne Sedgmore as executive director of the group, or that he will climb the ladder further, whether in or out of Westminster. "I've been doing this job for two years effectively, maybe two and a bit, and I think in terms of working environments, this again has been such a shift, both in terms of how 157 works and the whole working at home and all the practicality stuff, but also getting to grips with the Westminster village, and how the national press works, and the national education press, which is a very different animal from the local press. "I think after two and a bit years I'm just about getting to understand it all, because we're human beings, it takes a long time to adjust to working in a different environment of any sort. So if I'm honest, I think it's

probably a little bit early for me to really be thinking: 'Okay, where does this go?' "What I do know is that I think I've got some interesting ideas to offer for the world of education, how that world might develop, whether that is continuing to do this kind of role, ending up in a more senior role, ending up in the Department for Education [he winces]. I honestly don't know." But you could forgive Gannon for having something other than his career at the front of his mind. As many of you read this, he and his partner Dan Watts, 36 will be entering into a civil partnership. "We are very deliberately having a civil partnership, rather than a wedding," says Gannon. "I am very pleased that gay marriage is on the statute book and people can do it if they want to, but for me, the issue is that my relationship is valued and is not an issue, rather than I might now slip into the same centuries-old institution that everybody else always has."



FE INSIDER

Stratford-upon-Avon College director of marketing, communications and admissions, and former 157 Group policy and communications officer, Gemma Knott writes the exclusive FE Insider column for *FE Week* on the first Monday of every month

Election time is not the only occasion to listen to learners

With the General Election soon coming around we are all hearing the word ‘vote’ over and over again.

But what I want to know is how young people are franchised to represent their views on education and skills in two ways.

The first as the electorate affected directly by future changes in government and the second as young people not wanting those changes.

My observation since working in college is that there is no product in a box offering the perfect student voice environment for young people.

There are pockets of best practice of course, but for many the term “student voice” sparks more feelings of dread than inspiration.

Dread because it can be seen as a tick box exercise for Ofsted.

What we really need to do, and fast, is get involved, engaged and motivated to talk to, champion and implement the thoughts and ideas of young people in colleges.

I’ve been toying with the idea of setting up my own youth think tank for a while. I guess I should practice what I preach and ask the young people if they think this would have any worth.

So with all of this in mind I’d really like to reinforce how important it is that we colleges listen seriously to what our students want from us.

How many senior managers take the time to interact with the students? Do we all understand the student journey? How many of us get out on the “shop floor” to learn what truly happens in the classroom?

Look at what happens on Undercover Boss and the benefits that has when you endeavour to understand how your organisation runs, from every perspective.

I had the privilege recently of students undertaking a marketing module as part of their studies visiting my marketing department to ask questions and I really enjoyed getting back to the “basics” and interacting with them in this way.

When you’re in a business support role it’s so easy to forget why you’re in the role and what the overall purpose is.

If we want the students to vote with their feet and come to colleges given all of the competition that’s out there, and we want to secure our reputation, we must start paying even more attention to our customers.

There are too many white papers and think pieces telling us what will happen yet not working with the very customer (student) to better understand their views on the education and skills landscape.

When we vote we look at the manifesto,



LYNNE SEDGMORE

Executive director of the 157 Group

Four education policy principles to stick to

The 157 Group’s latest report, *Future Colleges*, outlines four principles it wants those in power to adhere to in determining education policy, as Lynne Sedgmore explains.

At the 157 Group, we know about the excellent work that colleges, both our members and others, are doing every day across the country to enable learners to acquire the skills they need for successful working lives.

We also know about the demands of policymakers for provision to continually improve, and for us to respond to new initiatives, increased competition and seemingly unending change.

We know about all this, but we wanted to find out more about the scale of the college contribution to the skills agenda. What we discovered has led to the publication of our new report *Future Colleges*, in which we set our clearly not only what colleges have achieved, but what we believe they can do in the future if policymaking recognises their importance.

In six key areas, we set out how critical colleges are to our skills system how they have led the way in the resurgence of apprenticeships, are the leading providers of technician skills at levels three and four, how they deliver higher education designed to meet local employment needs and have been key to raising literacy and numeracy rates.

Colleges teach the majority of young people post-16, mainly in a vocational context, and act as recruitment hubs for employers, securing meaningful work experience, implementing targeted programmes for unemployed people, and supporting routes into learning and job progression for adults.

Given this track record, we argue strongly that it is colleges, rather than any other form of new institution, that should be trusted to lead the future development of our skills system.

We describe a future where every community in the country has a well-respected and trusted college which is at the centre of collaboration in the local skills system, a leader and innovator in high-level technical education, a hub of workforce development for all employers and the focus for community cohesion, personal development and enterprise strategies.

We know that colleges have the leadership to be able to achieve this level of influence and importance — many are already in this position. But we are convinced that our national approach to policymaking

has hindered rather than helped the many achievements to date.

For all the talk of ‘freedom and flexibility’, we hear all too often that the detailed implementation of policy delivers quite the opposite effect, that funding rules change in ways that make it hard to deliver responsive local solutions, and that, all too often, it feels as though provision is dictated by a set of system-wide diktats, which remove, rather than promote, autonomy.

And we know that there remains much inequity in the system — leaving colleges, schools and universities judged by widely differing measures and systems, and creating perverse behavioural incentives that affect the provision of careers education, among other things.

It is colleges, rather than any other form of new institution, that should be trusted to lead the future development of our skills system

So we are using our vision to call upon a future government to also play its part, and to commit to four key principles in education policy making. The first is stable structures — refraining from further changes to structures and institutions and from imposing more top down delivery initiatives on the skills system.

The second is equal treatment — in ensuring both funding and accountability treats all learners’ experiences as individual, whether they be in school, college, university or employment; and the third is the freedom to innovate — for local college, community and business leaders to devise and deliver solutions.

The fourth is durable funding — a stable financial settlement within which to plan.

We hope that these are key principles that all in the sector can champion.

With only seven months to go to the next general election, we know that there will be many policy changes suggested. We will support those that can be tested against our four principles. And we hope, in this way, to help to create a long-term future for our vitally important skills system.

Skills Minister Nick Boles told *FE Week* that he was willing to allow some apprenticeship to be graded as simply pass or fail, despite reforms seeming to have been heading in the direction of a pass, merit or distinction system. Iain Mackinnon explains why he welcomed the move.

The maritime sector has been one of those lobbying government to take a more flexible approach on grading, so we were delighted to see *FE Week* report that Skills Minister Nick Boles plans to do just that.

But is it a “U-turn,” or just good policy-making? Let me tell you more of the story, and let you decide.

As part-time Secretary of the Maritime Skills Alliance I was keen that the maritime sector bid to become a Trailblazer in Round Two.

I was concerned that none of the Round One Trailblazers was in an industry which was heavily regulated.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency administers a worldwide convention which defines standards of competence for seafarers, and the results are widely accepted.

And even if they weren’t, they are the law. We needed to see “employer-led” read intelligently in the context of a heavily-regulated industry.

The maritime sector has, however, the huge advantage in Trailblazer terms that we have long worked to just the kind of standards of competence which Doug Richard recommended.

And because those standards are international, seafarers can use their



STEWART SEGAL

Chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers

Keep it simple on grading

Government reforms to apprenticeships go further than simply how the programme is funded and looked to include the introduction of a new grading system. Stewart Segal explains his concerns about these grading changes.

We raised a number of concerns about grading from the first recommendations following the 2012 report of Doug Richard.

While we welcome the fact the government has listened to concerns from employers, we along with providers believe the flexibility offered may not provide a full solution to the issue. There is a danger that allowing different approaches to grading will create some confusion.

Many of the published assessment strategies have very little detail of how the grading will be implemented. Many employers accept that the competence elements of the programme should not be graded. This will mean that the grading will be based on the knowledge elements of the standard, which cannot be right.

We recommended that the established



IAIN MACKINNON

Secretary to the Maritime Skills Alliance, managing director of the Mackinnon Partnership and former college governor of 14 years

A U-turn — or simply listening?

certificates of competence to work anywhere in the world — a far bigger prize than a standard recognised only in England.

We are not alone in our concerns, and certainly do not pretend that the maritime voice alone has led to the Minister shifting position

The sector is so heavily regulated because seafarers die every year. Last year was the safest 12 months ever for accidents at sea involving British seafarers, with just five fatalities — but that’s five too many, and we need constant vigilance to keep the

number falling.

That’s why we were so concerned about the insistence by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) that apprenticeships must be graded.

The very strong belief of employers in the sector was that someone is either safe to be on board, or they are not. There can be no room for compromise, and no room for the sort of ambiguity which might creep in if one person was judged to be acceptable, and others more merit-worthy.

Mr Boles responded positively when we made our case to him, acknowledging our concerns and indicating that there was room for compromise.

We went back to him earlier this month, however, exasperated that over both grading and end-point assessment we were still being pushed towards an approach which employers — very emphatically — did not want.

We have a system which works for us, and one which fits the spirit of Mr Richard’s recommendation, but not the letter of the administrative requirements they have been translated into.

I know that we are not alone in our

However the guidelines have been made more flexible.

The changes recently announced are acceptance that the structure can be fail, pass and distinction (rather than the four-level structure); not all elements need to be graded — some employers will not grade competence-based elements; and grading can be based on the end test only or cover formative assessments as well. The other change is that some exceptions have been made where no overall grade will be awarded and only some elements of the standards will be graded.

Many employers are not comfortable with the imposition of grades within the new apprenticeship standards

Although these changes are a response to concerns set out by us and also employers, they do not go far enough and we are still concerned by the implementation of grading. Our concerns were set out clearly in our response to the original proposals and they included grading will be very complex to introduce at the same time as introducing the new standards; having different grading structures (three or four levels of grades) in different standards will be very

concerns, and certainly do not pretend that the maritime voice alone has led to the Minister shifting position.

What’s happening here? BIS had the task of translating Mr Richard’s pretty broad-brush recommendations into administrative requirements. They chose an explicitly experimental approach, inviting groups of employers to be “Trailblazers” for the new system.

England is just small enough that policy-makers can get away with treating the whole country as a single entity, applying the same approach to everyone.

But if policy-makers dig in their toes too soon — usually to sound tough — they run the risk that their conclusions don’t fit all circumstances. With luck we get a Minister who listens when their tough stance bumps into unhelpful reality.

We have been particularly lucky to have three Skills Ministers in a row who listen. John Hayes set a fine example and then we had Matthew Hancock and now Mr Boles — two high flyers close to the government’s inner circle, with the personal and political self-confidence to shift their stance when they thought it justified.

We all want sensible policy-making where political leaders and their officials genuinely listen. Charles Clarke’s excellent new book, *The Too Difficult Box*, gives a number of examples where a little more humility earlier in the process would have made for better decisions.

So call this a “U-turn” if you want, but what really matters is that the government has listened to reasoned argument, and that we have a better policy.

confusing; and, the details of how grading will be implemented in the new assessment strategies lack any detail.

We had further concerns that there is no detail of how there will be any standardisation or how apprentices will appeal any decisions; and that many standards will only grade knowledge-based elements which means that the competence-based elements will not be central to the grading of the standards.

Our recommendations therefore have been that employers should be given the option of whether to introduce grading. Many employers would choose the option of introducing the new standards and introduce grading once the standards have been established.

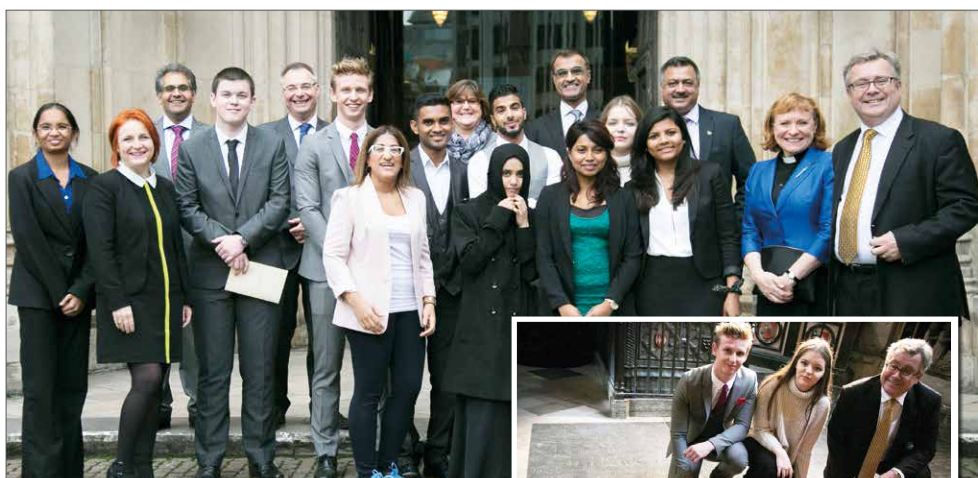
We are also concerned that grading will put the emphasis on the knowledge elements. Many employers have said that competence elements of the standard can only be judged pass or fail. Either an apprentice is competent or not.

This will also make it difficult to ensure that the grading will be standardised across all types of working environments.

The choice for employers should also include the option of using the nationally-recognised skills tests. There are well-established skills tests in many sectors used by skills competitions. These tests are standardised and can be delivered in any working environment. These could be optional for employers and apprentices so that the apprenticeship standards are based on pass and fail and then there are options to take the skills tests to prove mastery.

CAMPUS ROUND-UP

Plaque at Westminster Abbey honours industrialist



Staff and students from Birmingham Metropolitan College outside Westminster Abbey

Learners unveiled a plaque at Westminster Abbey honouring 18th Century Birmingham industrialist Matthew Boulton.

A group of 11 Birmingham Metropolitan College students studying a range of science, technology, engineering and maths courses and senior staff including principal Andrew Cleaves travelled to London to attend a memorial service for Mr Boulton.

Level three pharmacy student Jacob Pearson, aged 19, and English, history and sociology A-level learner Ellie Coleman, 17,



Birmingham Metropolitan College learners Jacob Pearson and Ellie Coleman and principal Andrew Cleaves by the plaque

unveiled a plaque on the Abbey's floor in his honour.

Birmingham-born Mr Boulton developed the Boulton & Watt steam engine, which drove up production rates at factories across Britain during the Industrial Revolution, with his business partner James Watt.

Ellie said: "It was a great privilege to unveil a national memorial to one of Birmingham's leading entrepreneurs."

Ainsley dishes out FE team of the year award

High achieving FE staff were recognised at national teaching awards.

The hospitality and catering department at Yorkshire-based Selby College, led by catering manager Adrian Dawes, was given the team of the year award by celebrity chef Ainsley Harriott at the Pearson Awards ceremony at London's Guildhall.

Mr Dawes said: "It has taken total dedication and a great deal of hard work to achieve this."

Kirklees College curriculum team leader for teacher training Corrine Scandling collected the FE lecturer of the year award from Hugh Quarshie, who plays surgeon Ric Griffin in BBC medical drama Holby City.

Mrs Scandling said: "I would like to thank my current and past students for nominating me. You don't realize how much you touch people's lives through teaching until something like this happens."



From left: Selby College level two professional cookery learners Joe Isherwood and Owen Campey, both aged 17, Ainsley Harriott, and students Rosie Friar, 18, and Ryan Bastiman, 17

FORMER SOLDIER'S COLLEGE RESEARCH COULD HELP SAVE LIVES OF FUTURE TROOPS

A former soldier who served in Afghanistan and Iraq has been recognised for research he did at Bournemouth & Poole College that could save troops' lives, writes Paul Offord.

Robert Lewis knows all about the shortcomings of the body armour worn by soldiers.

The 27-year-old, who joined the Army aged 16, wore the bulky and uncomfortable protective suits under his uniform during tours of duty in Bazra, Iraq, in 2005, and Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in 2007.

Robert left the Army five years ago and enrolled on an access to higher education science diploma at Bournemouth & Poole College in September 2013.

He had the idea of researching whether non-Newtonian fluids, which harden when they come into contact with solid objects, could be used in body armour for a three-month study project.

Robert carried out a series of laboratory and practical tests at a shooting range over three months with fellow students Paul Malonowskui, 38, and Nevy Baze, 20.

They proved silicon and polyethylene glycol combined to make a gel could repel bullets and knife attacks.

Robert said: "We were warned we were going to be given a special project. But there was nothing out of the options we were presented with that excited me, so I asked if I could come up with my own. I was interested in Newtonian fluids and thought to myself 'I wonder if it could be used for body armour?'"



Left : Robert while serving in Iraq

"We had to prove the concept was viable in the lab, then did the tests by shooting at it in a firing range."

He added: "The substances we researched could be used instead of the metal or ceramics, making the armour a lot lighter

From left: Paul Malonowskui, Robert Lewis and Nevy Baze

and more flexible."

The research earned the trio registered science technician status from the Royal Society of Chemistry in London.

Antony Wright, college director of adult education, said: "Rob went in harm's way for

his country and that inspired him to apply some of the basic science he learned at the college in the context of a practical problem — how to get the best protection when under threat.

"People working in perhaps less stressful environments than Robert can now follow his example and contribute to the science knowledge base."

All three of the learners completed their college courses in June and have now started science degrees at Bournemouth University.

"My mum Jill is proud of me. She probably didn't think I was very academic after I left school without any qualifications for the Army," said Robert.

Robert hopes to work in defence after graduating from university.

He said: "I have been in contact with the Ministry of Defence about taking our research further. It would be nice to think it could help protect soldiers one day."



Robert with a poster explaining the research

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN CAMPUS ROUND-UP?

Send your stories with pictures to campus@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course details of students where applicable

& MOVERS & SHAKERS

Your weekly guide to who's new and who's leaving

Two new deputy principals have been appointed at opposite ends of the country.

Chris Toon has taken up post at Gateshead College, while Jacqueline Grubb has done the same at Basingstoke College of Technology (BCot).

Mr Toon, who had spent the previous two years at Liverpool's Knowsley Community College, has more than 15 years' experience of the education and skills sectors.

A qualified teacher and experienced lecturer, he was appointed to an advanced practitioner post within four years of starting his career in FE.

Mr Toon, whose official job title is deputy principal — curriculum and quality, said: "I am thrilled to be joining this forward-thinking college at an exciting, challenging time in FE."

"Gateshead College recognises that the sector is changing and is adapting the way it delivers education to coincide with this change, making sure students are employment-ready with the qualifications and skills needed to support our economy."

Judith Doyle, principal and chief executive at Gateshead College, said: "Chris is exactly the type of entrepreneurial, innovative individual we were seeking to appoint."

"I'm confident that he'll help us to continue to support and inspire our staff to deliver world-class teaching, ensuring that our students are the most highly prized in the jobs market."

"There were some strong candidates for the position but Chris's skills and experience made him the ideal choice. We were impressed with his commitment and passion for Gateshead College and his unwavering dedication to the staff, students and community that we serve."

Ms Grubb's title at BCot is deputy principal for curriculum, performance and innovation.

She joins from Swindon College and brings with her 27 years of FE experience that includes work as an Ofsted Inspector.

"Enjoying a successful career in the hair



Chris Toon and beauty industry including owning my own business, I was approached to undertake some part-time lecturing alongside this and discovered a passion for teaching and learning," she said.

"Part-time lecturing became full-time lecturing, curriculum and quality management and then into senior leadership,



Jacqueline Grubb alongside this I was an External Verifier and am still currently working with Ofsted as an Inspector."

She added: "I'm delighted to be joining the team at BCot in this new role and will continue to grow the college's reputation and deliver a quality product, focussing on performance and innovation."

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk

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Derwentside College

Curriculum Manager - Foundation Learning and Learner Support

Salary: £42,744 - £46,698 per annum (full-time permanent post)
Consett, County Durham

The College is seeking to appoint an outstanding Curriculum Manager, with both drive and enthusiasm, whose management experience has already indicated their potential to become an exceptional leader and manager. The successful candidate will be expected to provide outstanding leadership, direction and operational support for a team of curriculum staff – inspiring, motivating and developing team members, resulting in levels of learner experience and rates of learner retention and achievement that are outstanding. Additionally, they will be required to display entrepreneurial flair, to deploy business planning skills and to grow and diversify income sources.

Applicants should ideally have a first degree (or equivalent), a teaching qualification, at least 2 years' teaching experience, a successful track record of continuous quality improvement and a sound knowledge of priorities and developments in further education including work based learning. Also essential are excellent leadership and management skills, proven ability to achieve challenging KPIs, demonstrable competence in both data management and curriculum planning, the ability to manage budgets and resources effectively and experience of successfully developing partnerships and employer relationships. Applicants should also demonstrate a genuine commitment to educational values and equality of opportunity and a high level of personal integrity.

As an equal opportunities employer, the College welcomes applicants from all sections of the community.

Application packs can be obtained by visiting our website www.derwentside.ac.uk. Alternatively, email personnel.dept@derwentside.ac.uk or telephone (01207) 585947 to request a pack.

Closing date for applications – Friday 14th November 2014



CHRIST THE KING SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Christ the King Sixth Form College is a highly successful and heavily oversubscribed Catholic sixth form college located on three sites in south east London. We wish to appoint committed and enthusiastic staff to the following teaching posts:


- Business Full-Time (Sidcup)
- History Full or Part-Time (Sidcup)
- Media Part-Time Approx 0.4 (Sidcup)
- Maths and/or Physics Full or Part-Time (Brockley)

For an application form and further details visit our website www.ctksfc.ac.uk/vacancies

Closing date 13th November 2014

Early applications considered favourably

Start January 2015 for two terms in the first instance



Farnborough College of Technology

HEAD OF SCHOOL A 'LEVEL & ACCESS REQ000350
£57,408 PER ANNUM FULL-TIME


As an Outstanding College we are looking for an inspirational leader to lead and manage one of our key Academic Schools.

In addition to our successful A 'level and Access programmes the School is also responsible for humanities degrees, counselling, teacher/learning support education.

Reporting directly to the Vice Principal, the role is responsible for both giving clear strategic direction to the School as well as day to day operational management.

Applicants must hold a relevant degree and teaching qualification. In addition they will need a substantial track record of managing a team and developing the curriculum ideally at A 'level or another of the key areas of work listed above.

This is a superb opportunity for a first class applicant to develop their management career. In return we can offer a fresh challenge and a rewarding opportunity with an excellent benefits package.



Farnborough College of Technology is an Equal Opportunities Employer.

CLOSING DATE: 12TH NOVEMBER 2014
TO APPLY:
Please go to our website (www.farn-ct.ac.uk/jobs) for further information or to apply online.

TRIBAL


working as one

Freelance Sales Consultancy

Tribal Education is a leading provider of vocational learning resources and support services to the further education sector. We are looking to expand our customer base and develop new partnerships across a range of further education providers.

We wish to grow our team of freelance sales consultants, either individuals or organisations, who can identify new customers and generate significant sales opportunities. If you are interested in working with us and would like an informal discussion please contact our Director of Commercial Services, Joe Keegan, by email to joe.keegan@tribalgroup.com or telephone **07736 807912**.

To find out more about Tribal's work with the further education sector go to www.tribalgroup.com/publishing



Going places? So are we.

Vice Principal Resources, Tameside College
£Highly competitive + relocation, Ashton-under-Lyne



When considering your next career move you want to be confident that you'll benefit from the professional support and development opportunities that enable you to reach your full potential. As part of a new senior management team at Tameside College you'll find just that – as well as a genuine commitment to team working and ambitious plans for future growth.

Tameside College is a place where students and staff flourish – and you can too. With a turnover of £24m+, good and improving success rates, strong financial health and a major capital investment programme underway, we're looking to the future with confidence and realistic plans for growth.

As our new Vice Principal Resources, you will have a broad remit which includes Finance, IT, MIS and Estates. You will also be joining a small, newly formed senior team with a clear strategic remit to ensure the College continues to deliver sustained and demand-led curriculum growth. Previous experience of capital projects would be useful but isn't essential as the first phase of the new build programme will be handled by the existing team. A qualified chartered accountant, you will be a strategic thinker with significant knowledge and experience of FE funding streams, strong expertise in MIS and exceptional leadership skills.

This is a rare opportunity for an ambitious individual with a proven track record in a senior resources role in a high performing college to take the next step in their career. If you are attracted by the opportunity to play a major part in shaping the future of Tameside College in the communities it serves and more widely within the Greater Manchester FE community we would like to hear from you.




Visit www.tamesidevp.co.uk to find out more or contact Trudy Searle or Mike Galloway at Navigate on **07791 090141 / 07765 595758**.
Closing date: 19th November.
Longlist interviews: week commencing 1st December.
Final interviews week commencing 8th December.



Principal / Chief Executive

The Bournemouth & Poole College

Salary: Negotiable & highly competitive



With an income of £37m and a diverse offer including a wide range of vocational qualifications for young people and adults, 'A' levels, adult skills, HE, international and employer focused provision, the Bournemouth & Poole College is vibrant, ambitious and committed to providing the best possible all round learning environment.

We have been on a fantastic journey over the last few years, culminating in our highest ever success rates and an Ofsted outcome which highlights the college as outstanding in several areas. Our college ethos to "Aspire, Achieve and Succeed" is reflected in the excellent progression of our students and our excellent apprenticeship success rates. We are proud to provide one of the best student experiences in the country, as evidenced by our two national 'firsts' in the prestigious "Leading the Learner Voice" awards. In addition, the high quality of our partnership working and ambition for our local community are exemplary.

Our ambition is clear and simple – to be Outstanding. We are looking for a charismatic and visionary leader to inspire and motivate our workforce and ensure that we continue on our positive trajectory.

Innovative and entrepreneurial, our next Principal will champion the quest for ongoing excellence and continuous quality improvement, while nurturing the college's strong external relationships with employers and community partners.

Whether you are a current serving Principal or an aspiring leader, if you have a successful track record coupled with the energy, drive and gravitas to match our ambitions we would like to hear from you.

For further information please view our microsite:
www.aocrecruit.co.uk/bournemouth-poole

For an informal discussion about the post please contact **Bernie Cullen** or **Harpreet Jossan** on **020 7034 2631** or email bernie_cullen@aoc-create.co.uk / harpreet_jossan@aoc-create.co.uk
Closing date for applications is **Monday 24 November 2014**.
Telephone screening of long listed candidates will take place on **Thursday 11 December 2014**.
Final selection will be held in the college on **Thursday 15** and **Friday 16 January 2015**.



Herefordshire & Ludlow College

FULL TIME LECTURER / COURSE TUTOR IN MOTOR VEHICLE STUDIES

£23,436 - £30,934 depending on qualifications and experience

You will deliver a range of subjects to mainly full time 16-19 year old students and apprentices studying IMI Light Vehicle Technician qualifications at Levels 1, 2 & 3. The ideal candidate will be fully qualified (minimum Level 3) and have relevant work / industrial experience within the motor vehicle industry. Those without teaching experience, but willing to train towards, are welcome to apply.

HLC is committed to safeguarding and promotes the welfare of all learners and expects all staff to share this commitment.

Visit our website at www.hlcollege.ac.uk email personnel@hlcollege.ac.uk or telephone (01432) 365374 for job descriptions and application forms.

Closing date: Friday 21 November 2014
Interview date: Tuesday 9 December 2014 (pm)





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JOBS



ASPIRE to work for the most exciting and fastest growing
Apprenticeship company, with opportunities to **ACHIEVE** real
success by helping our Apprentices to **ADVANCE** their careers.

Aspire Achieve Advance (3aaa) is the fastest growing provider of Apprenticeships in the country. Working with some of the most innovative companies in the country, we deliver life changing opportunities for young people in Technology, Social Media and Accountancy.

We are now looking to fill the following positions to support us in the next stage of our growth as we increase the number of Academies from which we operate and double the number of Apprentices that we have on our programmes in the next 12 months:

Finance Director: We are looking for an inspirational Finance Director who will form part of our leadership team as we continue with the unprecedented growth that we started in the last year. This is not a 'standard' FD role but one where we are looking for drive, innovation and fast decision making, and for the individual to be integral to the success of 3aaa. The role will be based at our Head Office in Derby and offers a market leading salary rate. To find out more about the role, contact the 3aaa Managing Director, Andy Palmer on 01332 880515

Head of Compliance: The Head of Audit and Compliance will report directly to the Managing Director but will also have a direct reporting line into the Chairman. The role will be responsible for providing strategic advice and guidance to the Board of Directors which accomplishes the business Audit and Compliance objectives. The role will be based at our Head Office in Derby and offers a market leading salary rate. To find out more about the role, contact the 3aaa Managing Director, Andy Palmer on 01332 880515

Assessors and Trainers: We are currently recruiting for Assessors and Trainers in Technology, Social Media and Accountancy across all of our 30 Academies nationwide. The main responsibility of these roles is to assess and train our Apprentices throughout the programme, both in the academy and in the work place. Market leading salary rates will be offered for the role.

To arrange a time to speak about any of our new roles, please send a copy of your CV and a covering letter outlining your skills and experience to Jess Ford (3aaa HR Advisor) at recruitment@3aaa.co.uk. Check out our website for more information about the roles and to find out more about our programmes and locations: www.3aaa.co.uk

3aaa, Aspire House
Sitwell Street, Derby, DE1 2JT
T: 01332 880 515
E: recruitment@3aaa.co.uk



www.3aaa.co.uk

Principal

Required for January 2015:
Salary circa. £88,000 + performance bonus
(negotiable for an exceptional candidate)
(Mixed 16-19 College opening with 150 students, growing to 720)



The POWERLIST FOUNDATION Post 16 Leadership COLLEGE

A new high-performing Post 16 college opening in Central London in September 2015

Are you the person to lead what is probably the most innovative school in the country?

Do you believe in the need to develop high level leadership skills in all young people?

Are you passionate about raising the aspirations of all students and staff?

Are you prepared to be part of an Academy Trust that is dedicated to becoming an international model of success?

Have you the personal characteristics to work collaboratively with business leaders and a diverse London community to help create the leaders of tomorrow?

How to Apply:

Application forms and further details are available from Caroline Barringer, The Aspirations Academies Trust, Aspirations Campus, Tachbrook Road, Feltham, TW14 9PE
Email: carolinebarringer@aspirationsacademies.org or can be downloaded from: www.powerlistfoundationcollege.org
Learn more about Aspirations Academies at www.aspirationsacademies.org
Closing date for applications: Wednesday 19th November 2014 at 4:00pm

JOBS

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS MATHS TUTOR



Stockton on Tees
Full Time
Competitive Salary

Applications Close: 30th November 2014

An opportunity for a Functional Skills Tutor for Maths has arisen at CableCom Training Ltd based at our Stockton office.

The successful candidate will be a Maths Graduate (or a degree graduate with significant Maths content) to join our Functional Skills team supporting the teaching of Maths in post 16 education, particularly within our apprenticeship provision.

This is an ideal opportunity for anyone who would like a career in teaching, putting knowledge gained into practice whilst undertaking a recognised teaching qualification with us. For further details and to apply, please send a copy of your **CV** and a **covering letter** to:

karen.glencross@cablecomtraining.co.uk



Recruiting a maths teacher?

Awards of £20,000 and £30,000 available from Education and Training Foundation

Funding is available for colleges and training providers looking recruit and train a maths graduate, or graduate with good maths skills, to train to teach in the further education and training sector.

Earlier this year we gave out 124 awards and have just extended the scheme with up to 110 available. £20,000 is available to recruit an individual teacher or £30,000, for those who will be sharing their teaching expertise with other organisations.

Apply for funding by 15th December 2014.
Visit www.etfoundation.co.uk for details
or call 0300 303 1877

"The award has enabled us to find an excellent appointment who would not have applied otherwise" Assistant Principal, North East Surrey College of Technology.

0.5 FTE Lecturer in English
£14,758.50 - £18,303 per annum inc.
London Weighting Allowance pro rata
18 hours per week - Fixed Term



Are you passionate about the importance of developing English & Maths Skills?
Would you like to be part of a team developing a new strategy to improve the delivery and quality of English and Maths teaching and learning? Then this role could be for you...

City of Westminster College is embarking on an exciting stage of its development. With a thriving student population, a strong and growing business portfolio and a stunning £102m new campus, we are poised to become the first choice College in the capital for students and staff. Recently graded 'Good' by Ofsted, pursuing a new growth strategy, the College continues on with its quest to make an impact on both the quality of teaching and learning as well as the progression and employment opportunities of our learners. We invest heavily in the professional development of our staff, and would like to encourage suitably qualified persons to apply for this role.

The Directorate of 18 to 18 Programmes is seeking an enthusiastic, flexible and innovative 0.5 FTE Lecturer of English to teach across a range of levels, vocational areas, age groups and courses including Functional Skills and GCSE across the College.

Ref: 0.5 LIE

If you're ready to join a College that has the resources to develop the talents of both students and staff, you can find more information on this role and details on how to apply by visiting our vacancies section on our College website: <http://www.cwc.ac.uk>. Alternatively, you can e-mail us on recruitment@cwc.ac.uk for an information pack and application form, quoting the job reference above.

Closing date: 12pm, Friday 14th November

ENGLISH AND MATHS JOBS

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FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

Difficulty:
EASY

	8			2			4	
2		3				6		5
4		9				3		7
			4		2			
		8	6		3	5		
			9		5			
5		6				4		8
8		4				7		9
	3			9			5	

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

9		2			4			3
			1			6		2
7	6							
				8			3	6
				4				
3	7			5				
							7	9
5		9			6			
4			2			5		8

Solutions:
Next week

Last Week's solutions

2	4	9	7	5	6	8	1	3
1	5	6	2	8	3	7	9	4
3	7	8	9	1	4	2	6	5
9	6	1	8	7	5	3	4	2
7	8	2	3	4	1	9	5	6
4	3	5	6	2	9	1	8	7
5	9	3	1	6	7	4	2	8
6	2	7	4	9	8	5	3	1
8	1	4	5	3	2	6	7	9

Difficulty:
EASY

3	9	7	2	1	8	4	6	5
1	4	2	5	3	6	7	9	8
6	5	8	9	7	4	2	3	1
2	1	3	4	6	5	9	8	7
8	6	5	3	9	7	1	4	2
4	7	9	1	8	2	3	5	6
5	2	6	7	4	3	8	1	9
9	8	4	6	2	1	5	7	3
7	3	1	8	5	9	6	2	4

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Spot the difference
to WIN an FE Week mug!



Spot five differences. First correct entry wins an FE Week mug. Text your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to 07969 166 374.

Last week's winner was Paul Grocott, PA to the senior leadership team at Buxton & Leek College.

